

School staff swap classroom for the street

The Middlesbrough and Teesside Philanthropic Foundation are organising another Big Sleepout at Middlesbrough College in November. Pictured are staff from St Bede's RC Academy in Stockton who are all taking part.



Big-hearted staff at a Stockton primary school will swap the classroom for the street when they take part in the fifth Big Tees Sleepout next month.

Eleven of the team from St Bede's RC Primary School will sleep rough for the night to raise funds to fight homelessness and poverty across Teesside.

Teachers and classroom assistants will give up the comfort of their own beds for a night in the cold as part of the latest fundraising event organised by charitable movement Middlesbrough and Teesside Philanthropic Foundation.

They were inspired to take part by headteacher Bernadette Rizzi-Allan after she endured a previous sleepout she describes as "the worst night of my life".

But Bernadette, who lives in Linthorpe, Middlesbrough, has convinced members of her St Bede's team to join her in a bid to boost much-needed funds for local homelessness charities, food banks and other causes to support struggling Teessiders.

She previously took part in the Big Tees Sleepout last year with husband Dave and children Sophie and Grace.

“It was the worst night of my life and I vowed never to put myself through anything like that again,” she recalled. “There was non-stop wind and rain and I hardly slept a wink, so it was a really tough night.

“My daughters thought it was an adventure but I can’t say I enjoyed it one bit. But time is a great healer so I’m ready to do it again.

“I hoped one or two of my staff would join me but the response has been fantastic and there’ll be 11 of us there in our sleeping bags.

“Hopefully, we can raise a substantial amount of money for people who really need it. It’s awful that anyone on Teesside is homeless or living in poverty, so we’re looking to do our little bit to help.

“I’d encourage others to join us. I can promise them it will be a tough night but one that helps to raise the profile of such an important issue.”

Bernadette will be joined at the sleepout by St Bede’s staff Christina Shield, Catherine Wilkinson, Sandra Cowley, Jo Jones, Andrew Smurthwaite, Lisa Thomson, Bernadette Rizzi-Allan, Steph Pearson, Gemma Newbold, Denise Micallef, Dawn Purton, Jess Roberts and Trish West.

Around 100 Teessiders are expected to sleep rough outside Middlesbrough College on the night of Friday, 13th November.

Since holding the first sleepout in March 2013, similar events organised by the Philanthropic Foundation have raised a combined total of £67,000.

Hardy souls should bring along sleeping bags and mats, whilst wrapping up warm. Access to hot drinks and toilets will be provided.

For more details, fundraising tips and to sign up for the Big Tees Sleepout, visit (www.bigteessidesleepout.co.uk). Participants must be aged 16+